

Story 802 (1974 Tape 14)

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Location: Akdağmadeni, kaza
town of Yozgat
Province

Date: August 1974

The Chastity Wager on a Faithful Wife

Bekri Mustafa made a living by extorting money from the people of Istanbul. He had a brother who owned a coffee-house. Bekri Mustafa slept on top of his brother's coffee-house when he wanted to, he drank when he wanted to, and he worked when he wanted to.

At that same time there was a widow living in Istanbul who had a son. This son was a very handsome and strong boy, he upset his mother very much because he would not take interest in any girl she recommended to him as a likely bride. After a while she grew tired of trying.

One day when she was standing on a street corner, she was thinking about this problem, and she was thinking so hard that she drew the attention of an old man who happened to be passing by. He realized that she was deeply troubled, and he asked her, "Lady, what is wrong?" When she told him what was bothering her, the old man thought for a moment and then he said to her, "The sultan, who lives in that palace over there, has a beautiful and well-mannered

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daughter of about twenty. She does not know Istanbul at all, but you could never find a girl that was her equal. Your son might well like her, and if he does, you might have the two of them married

"Oh, but we are poor," the woman said, "and she is in the sultan's family.

The old man told her not to worry about that. "I do not think that that would have to be a problem.

Thinking that she had nothing to lose by trying, the woman finally went to the palace and knocked on the front door. Female slaves opened the door and asked her, "Lady, what do you want?"

"I want to talk with the sultan, if you will permit me to do so

When the slaves reported this to the sultan, he told them to let the woman come in. When the sultan asked her what she wanted, the woman told him that she had a son of marriageable age. "He wants a girl who is beautiful, religious, and who has not known or been known by Istanbul society. But my son, alas, is poor."

"His poverty would present no difficulty. If my daughter likes him, they may marry, but she cannot go anywhere with you outside the palace. He will have to come here."

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The woman was very pleased with this response, and she said that she would bring her son there in about an hour.

can walk about in your palace, and you will have an opportunity to look him over. If you like him, we can make of the necessary arrangements for their marriage.

She went home and told her son everything that had happened. He got dressed, went to the palace, met the sultan, and then walked about the royal quarters. Both the sultan and the sultan's daughter liked him very much, and afterwards the sultan told the boy's mother that he was entirely satisfactory.

It was not long after this that they were married in a big wedding that lasted for forty days and forty nights.

newly wedded couple went on a honeymoon and seemed to be very happy together. Of course, sometimes being completely satisfied can itself be disturbing to people. They need some kind of action. The young man said to his wife, Fitnat, "In our family it has been a tradition for a not to live on his wife's money.¹ I am going somewhere

¹ Having his own money is analogous to a man's having his own house. If a man marries and is unable to take his bride to live in an apartment in his father's house and is unable to afford a house of his own, he has no choice but to move in with his wife's family and live in her father's house. Such an unfortunate fellow bears the stigma of being called an "internal bridegroom."

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to work so that I shall have money of my own."

His wife said to him, "But Mehmet, where will you go? Almost everyone comes to Istanbul when he wishes to make money. Why would you want to go away?"

I would go any place I had to go."

wife pleaded with him for some time, but the young man was very stubborn. In the end, all that she could say was, "All right."

Taking his gun and a small amount of money, the young man mounted his horse and set out on a journey to seek his fortune. He went little, he went far. He crossed streams and went over hills. He went for six months and an autumn, } *Formali*
but when he looked back, he saw that he had gone only the } *Expensi*
distance of the length of a grain of barley.² Anyway,
he finally reached Izmir,³ which was then the second-
largest city in Turkey after Istanbul. He went to an inn
in Izmir, and after he was settled there, he asked if the
innkeeper could recommend a good coffeehouse to him. The

² This is a standard formula in Turkish folktales to pass over quickly the rigors and boring details of a protracted journey.

³ At the time in which this tale is set, the city was not yet called Izmir but Smyrna.

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innkeeper said, "There is one at Karşıyaka⁴ called Gâvur Hacı Coffeehouse."⁵

Mehmet went to that coffeehouse, sat down, and ordered a cup of coffee. When he paid for his coffee with a golden lira, everybody's eyes widened. Just at that moment they heard a change in the sound of movement in the coffeehouse. Mehmet asked, "What is happening?"

of the other customers there said, "You must be a stranger here. Gâvur Hacı is coming. Be careful around that man. He will become very ^{angry} with anyone who does not stand up when he enters the room

When Gâvur Hacı entered the coffeehouse, everyone immediately stood up except Mehmet. He remained seated, just as he had been before. Gâvur Hacı noticed this and said to him, "What bad manners you have, young man! Why don't you stand up?

young man answered, "Go away! Who do you think you are, anyway?"

Gâvur Hacı was ^{angry} by now. He said, "Let me ask you

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⁵ Gâvur Hacı is an unpromising, perhaps even ominous name, for it means Infidel Pilgrim or Unbelieving Pilgrim.

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question. Who do you think you are?"

"I am the son-in-law of Sultan Mecid the First. I am husband of the sultan's daughter, Fitnat."

Gâvur Hacı said, "Is that the same Fitnat that I once loved?"

Now the young man became angry. He said, "I spent years looking for a girl like her. How can you make the claim that you know her? If you once knew her, show me a memento, something which once belonged to her

"Give me three days," said Gâvur Hacı, "and I shall bring such a thing to you." He then left his coffeehouse, went to the docks, and took ship for Istanbul. There he found a witch^{6 131-134} and explained the situation to her. He then said, "You must somehow get me into the palace."

"All right. Here is what I need in order to do that. You must have constructed a large wooden box which can be locked from the outside but which can also be locked and unlocked from the inside. You will have one key and I shall the other."

⁶ In Turkish tradition the word witch may refer to a person with supernatural powers and occult connections, or it may, as here, refer simply to an unscrupulous old woman whose services can be bought for vicious or criminal purposes.

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Gâvur Hacı left and had the box built and then transported to the witch. She put him inside the box at once and hired ^{132, 133} porters to carry the box to the palace. When the slaves came to the door and asked her what she wanted, the witch said to them, "My son is going away on military service. I am taking him some food, but now that it has grown dark, how can I manage this heavy box? I should like to leave this box here on the porch and pick it up in the morning.

The slaves went to Fitnat and asked her for her permission to allow the box to be left on the porch overnight. The permission was granted, and the box remained on the porch.

Inside the box Gâvur Hacı had with him a flashlight, a watch, and a gun.⁷ At one o'clock in the morning he opened the box with his key and entered the palace. He found a beautiful woman in bed in the room he knew to be Fitnat's room. He found her to be so beautiful that he changed his mind about his purpose for entering the room and desired only to get into bed with her. When he tried

⁷ The first item is clearly an anachronism; the second probably is also; and the third, while possible timewise, would not have been something readily available to most people at the time of the action of this tale.

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to pull back the quilt near the top of the bed, he received a loud slap. He said to himself, "I tried this from the top of the bed and failed. Let me try it now from the bottom." But when he tried to pull back the quilt from the bottom, he received another loud slap.⁸ He then said to himself, "Since it seems impossible to get into this bed with her, let me do what I originally intended and get some memento from this room to take back and show her husband." He took a golden cup, a golden comb, and a golden pot and then returned to the wooden box

When Fitnat awakened in the morning, she noticed that the candles in the room had been blown out. She asked her slave girls who had come into her room during the night, but they said that they knew nothing of anyone's having entered her room. She then told them to go and see what was inside the wooden box that lay on the porch. They reported that they could not get into the box because it was locked securely.

Later in the morning the witch returned and claimed her box. She had ~~porters~~ carry it back to her house, where

⁸ The source of these two slaps is not explained here. The listener can only conclude at this point that it must have been some supernatural agency that delivered those blows, for in the morning the girl has no awareness of what went on in the room.

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Gâvur Hacı unlocked it from the inside and stepped out Giving the old woman a handful of gold, he took ship back to Izmir. As soon as he arrived there, he took the three objects stolen from Fitnat's room and delivered them to her husband.

As soon as Mehmet saw the golden cup, the golden comb, and the golden pot, he recognized them as Fitnat's property, and he said to Gâvur Hacı, "You win the bet!" To the customers in the coffeehouse he shouted, waving a glass, "Who would like to drink for the sake of this bad woman?"

Back in Istanbul Fitnat grew more and more worried. She was greatly concerned about the welfare of her husband from whom she had heard nothing since he had left.

husband was suffering from many unpleasant feelings He was very sad. He was dejected and hopeless. He was also angry. He sat down at last and wrote a letter to his wife in which he said this: "I looked for seven years for a girl from a good family. Then I found you. Now I know that you are even worse than a bad woman. I am selling water here in Izmir, and I shall continue that, for I never want to see you again."

When Fitnat received that letter, she called her slaves and said to them, "There was something very strange

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about that wooden box that we kept overnight on the porch. Then, after thinking for a moment, she asked them, "Do you know any reliable old man whom I might trust to do some work for me?"

One of them said, "There is an old man named Ahmet who would be reliable."

"Bring him here at once." When Ahmet arrived, she said to him, "Please take this money and buy me a nice suit of man's clothing and a pair of man's shoes. Whatever money is left is yours."

Disguise After Ahmet had returned with the things she had ordered, Fitnat dressed up as a man. She said to her slave girls, "No matter how long I may be gone, do not open the door to anyone but me."

Fitnat left the palace, but since this was the first time she had ever been outside by herself, she did not know where she should go. She just started walking, and after a while she came to the coffeehouse where Bekri Mustafa lived. She sat down there and ordered a cup of coffee. Everyone else in the coffeehouse looked at her, for here, they thought, was a very handsome young man. Some, however, said that there was something very unusual about this person. The owner of the coffeehouse asked her, "Are you a resident of Istanbul?"

"Yes.

"Do you need any help of any kind?"

"Yes, I do. I need a reliable man to do some work me. If this man already has a job which pays him ten liras, I shall pay him 100. If he does not have any job right now, I shall pay him 200 liras."

The coffeehouse owner was surprised to hear this. asked, "What is your name?"

"My name is Yellow Ağa." ⁹

"Well, Yellow Ağa, I have a brother whose name is Bekri Mustafa. He makes a living by extorting money from the people of Istanbul

"All right. I'll take him."

"Bekri, come here!" his brother called. "You have a job. Yellow Ağa wants you to work for him.

After Bekri had accepted this offer, Fitnat gave him some money and said, "Go and buy for each of us a horse, a whip, a bag, a gun, and a knife." After these purchases had been made, Fitnat and Bekri mounted their horses and rode to Izmir. When they arrived in that city, one of the

⁹ An ağa (also agha, especially in English) is a rural landholder and landlord. They are the leading citizens of their respective areas. Usually powerful and often wealthy, they are not usually titled or aristocratic men but successful, middle-class gentlemen farmers.

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first places they came to was the coffeehouse of Gâvur. They decided to stop there and drink some coffee.

While they were sitting there in Gâvur Hacı's coffee-house drinking coffee, Mehmet came along selling water. Fitnat called him over and ordered a cup of water. After she had drunk this water, she paid for it with a gold lira, and she said to Mehmet, "Go and get a shave! Don't you have a family? Why do you go about looking this way?"

Of course, Mehmet did not know that this was his talking to him. He went and got a shave. Three days later when he was passing that way again, he called out, "Water! Water! Who want to drink water?"

Fitnat called him over and ordered a cup of water. When she had finished drinking it, she gave him ten liras and told him to return to Istanbul.

Right at that moment Gâvur Hacı entered the coffee-house, and as he did so, everyone but Fitnat stood up. Very angry at her behavior, Gâvur Hacı asked her, "Why didn't you stand up?"

"Why should I stand up? Who do you think you are?"

"This man over here said that to me a short while ago, and now he is selling water for me. The same kind of thing will happen to you too!"

Fitnat called Bekri and said to him, "Show him who we

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are!" Bekri threw down Gâvur Hacı and beat him soundly. Bekri then asked everyone present, "Who wishes to side with him and help him?"

Nobody answered and Gâvur Hacı said, "I have had enough!" The Hacı felt that he had encountered some very troublesome people, but he decided to invite them for dinner and try to become friends of theirs.

That evening they went to Gâvur Hacı's house. He had a big table full of food and plenty of strong rakı.¹⁰ But Fitnat had with her some even stronger rakı, and she told Bekri to serve that stronger rakı to Gâvur Hacı. She did not drink any.

When the drinking started, Bekri always served Gâvur Hacı Istanbul rakı, and it was not long before Gâvur Hacı was very drunk. Fitnat then said to Bekri, "Pull his trousers down." When Bekri did this, she heated her father's imperial seal and branded Gâvur Hacı on one buttock with it.

following morning they returned to the Gâvur Hacı Coffeehouse, but Gâvur Hacı was not yet there. He had still not recovered from his drinking of the night before.

¹⁰ Rakı (irak or arrak elsewhere) is a liquor with an anise flavor. It is the most popular liquor in Turkey.

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When he finally arrived there, Fitnat said to him, "What has happened to you amounts to nothing. We shall do much worse yet."

After she left the coffeehouse, Fitnat wrote a letter to the local judge. This is what she said in that letter: "When I was a little girl my father died, and my uncle became the sultan. The man now called Gâvur Hacı grew up in our household. When my father was dying he was worried about this man, and in his will he warned us against him. My father was justified in believing him a bad man, for when this man left, he took many of the expensive things from our palace. He moved here and bought a business and became a rich man. Now that we have discovered him, we want to get our possessions back."

When they went to see the judge, he said, "I understand your claim against this man, but my men would not dare bring him into court."

Fitnat said, "Very well, but my man Bekri can do so

As a matter of fact, all that Bekri had to do was to go to the coffeehouse and say to Gâvur Hacı, "Come with me!" and he followed Bekri back to the judge's office. When he arrived there, the judge read aloud to him the accusation made against him.

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Gâvur Hacı denied what it said. "No, no, Your Honor. I am a native of this city, and what wealth I have I earned entirely by myself."

Fitnat said to the judge, "Of course he is going to deny it."

The judge then asked her, "How can you definitely prove the truth of your accusation?"

She said, "Your Honor, my father was a sultan. These are his signet rings. This man has these letters and the symbols of these signet rings marked upon one of his buttocks."

The judge ordered Gâvur Hacı to expose his buttocks, and when he saw the signet markings, he ordered that the accused man be beaten. The court confiscated all of Gâvur Hacı's property and distributed it among the poor. He now had nothing, and when Fitnat and Bekri Mustafa were returning to Istanbul, they asked him to go along with them as a servant.

Mehmet had already returned to Istanbul. As soon as he arrived there, he went to the palace to see his wife, but he was unable to find her anywhere. When Fitnat got back, she took off her male clothing and called her husband. When he came to her, she asked, "How could you ever have

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believed anything that that man said about me? He is here now in such-and-such a room. You must stay here and talk with him. Ask him about his lies about me!"

While Mehmet waited, Fitnat changed back into her male clothes. She then said to Bekri Mustafa, "Bring Gâvur Hacı here

When Gâvur Hacı was brought to them, they ordered him to tell the truth about how he had deceived Mehmet concerning his wife's chastity. He told them everything.

They had him tied to the tails of forty horses and then *Exe* *ten* whipped those horses. When the horses ran away, he was killed immediately.

Bekri Mustafa was given a place to live in the palace after that. And after that Mehmet and Fitnat lived happily together.

They lived.

Give us a life.